

**Presentation to Binational Conference by Carmen Mata,
farmworker in the San Quintín Valley of Baja California, Mexico
(Carson, Calif. – December 2, 2017)**

Greetings. My name is Carmen Mata. I am originally from Oaxaca, from the indigenous Mixteca people. I began working in the fields when I was 8 years old, and I have been working in the fields ever since.

Our Mixteca, Triqui and other indigenous sisters and brothers have left their lands over the past 25 years, migrating from place to place trying to find a better life.

From that time until today, the same violations and abuses continue to occur: Abuse of women in fields, physical abuse of every type imaginable, psychological abuse, and verbal abuse. Our children are also abused.

In San Quintin, our wages are very low: 120 pesos per day (approximately US\$7.50). We work 12 hours a day – all for the cost of a basket of strawberries sold in the United States. Our days are long. Our conditions are deplorable. We also do not have the right to decent housing, and we are not covered for our healthcare needs by IMSS (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social).

Pregnant women work right up till they give birth, when they should be resting for at least a month before delivering — and they should get a month off after childbirth. In San Quintin that does not happen.

A large number of people in San Quintin, as they have migrated from their places of origin and barely make enough money to survive, cannot build houses; instead their houses are made of cardboard and plastic.

We are fighting against the Driscoll's Corporation. They control the production chain, including the small companies. They make millions of dollars off our work, while we of Oaxacan origin get poorer with each passing day. They are taking away our health, our lives, and the lives of our children, many of whom are deprived of education. And they are polluting our lands with toxics banned elsewhere.

I can tell you that women farmworkers, mothers, get up between 3 and 4 in the morning to prepare breakfast and lunch for their children, to leave food ready so that they can have breakfast before going to school or to work in the fields. It is very common for parents to leave the very small children at home, alone, behind locked doors, so that nothing serious happens to them.

Unfortunately, when they are locked inside, accidents do occur. Homes have been burned to the ground, and children have died inside those houses. What are we to do? We don't have anyone to take care of them.

Women farmworkers, like all farmworkers, begin work at 5:30 am. When we enter the fields, our hands are stiff, frozen, wet. We pick strawberries, our sleeves get wet; if we pick cucumbers, our pants get wet. The sun rises at about 8 am; we call it the blanket of the poor.

We work from 5:30 am until 5 pm. It is only then that we can see our children. As mothers we do not rest; from the moment we get home we have to make dinner. We have to see that our children finish their chores. We have to leave the house a little bit clean for the next day.

And we have to bathe, because if we do not bathe, the pesticides that permeate our clothes will harm the health of our children. There are many children who have died of leukemia and who have developed serious kidney and skin diseases from all the pesticides that we carry in our clothes.

We have a break between 11 pm and midnight, and then we get some rest before we get up the next day and start the same thing all over. It cannot be said that we have a rest. You cannot say that we have vacations. Now that Christmas is coming, our children do not have gifts, because we as parents do not get a Christmas bonus. But we are satisfied that our children have food to eat.

That is why we ask you not to buy Driscoll's strawberries, because that company is putting an end to our lives and the lives of our children. With your help, we can and must make this an effective boycott of all Driscoll's produce.

We also ask you to support our demand that we be covered by IMSS so that we can reach a quiet old age, with a wage and pension after so many years of such hard work.

Unfortunately, until today, Driscoll's and their Mexican subsidiaries have refused to sit down with our elected union leaders to recognize our independent union and negotiate a collective-bargaining agreement that can improve our wages and working conditions. The bosses say they have already signed a contract with unions at San Quintin, but these are company unions – and company unions will always defend the employer, just as they are doing in San Quintin.

Many workers fear joining our union – our trusted, elected, independent union – out of fear of reprisals by the bosses. The struggle is not easy. But ever since we launched the movement for our rights and our dignity on March 17, 2015, we are standing tall – and we will not relent until we finish this fight. We are still standing, and we will continue to stand and fight until the day we win.

To make that happen, we need your help. Your struggle is our struggle, and I very much hope that our struggle is your struggle! Onward till victory!

And we are going to win, we are still standing, the struggle of you brothers is my fight, and I want my fight to be yours. Until the day we win it.